

Mrs. Belle T. Yeager

From Confederate Archives
officially assigned to the
West Va. Hist. Soc.

History
Roanoke Co.

BEVERLY UNDER ARTILLERY FIRE.

By Thomas J. Arnold, Elkins, W. Va.

An expedition that proved disastrous to the Confederates, and likewise for some who were not, was that connected with the occupation of Beverly, Va., now West Virginia, during the War between the States.

At the time of the Imboden raid through Western Virginia (April, 1863), Gen. William L. Jackson, who accompanied Imboden, casually remarked while in Beverly that he was coming back there to spend the 4th of July. Of course, no one took the remark seriously. Although it was commonly repeated afterwards, as well to the Federal commander as others, it passed unheeded. Sure enough, on the third day of July, a Confederate force unexpectedly appeared south of and in the vicinity of Beverly, under the command of Gen. William L. Jackson, who dispatched a detachment under Maj. J. B. Lady on the road leading northward, west of the river to its intersection with the road leading to Buckhannon, in order to cut off retreat in that direction. He having previously dispatched another detachment under the command of Col. A. C. Dunn, by a country road, eastward of the main road, with orders to occupy the road leading to Philippi, northward of Beverly, thus cutting off retreat in that direction. He planted his artillery on the slope of the hill, about one and one-half miles southwest of Beverly, and opened fire on the Federals, who were hurriedly gathered within their fortification. The Confederate guns were of small caliber, and, probably due to inferior ammunition, most of the shells fell short, landing in Beverly.

Col. Thomas M. Harris, of the 10th Virginia (Federal) Regiment, and who at a later period attained unenviable notoriety, as a member of the military court that tried and convicted Mrs. Surratt and sent her to the scaffold, was in command of the Federals. Guards were stationed on all the roads leading from Beverly; and no one--man, woman, or child--was permitted to pass these guards; hence all civilians were confined to the limits of the town and were thereby subjected to the fire of the Confederate artillery. Although this firing continued for a considerable part of two days, no citizens were injured, and but few houses were struck by shells.

It has always been the understanding, which is probably correct, that the detachment Jackson sent to approach Beverly from the north and open the attack, had in the course of their march found a supply of apple brandy; and the detachment became so intoxicated, that they lost sight of and interest in the undertaking. Jackson waited impatiently throughout the first day for the officer in command of this detachment to make the attack, as pre-arranged; the second day he was still expecting it every moment, but received no intelligence. Along toward noon there appeared, advancing up the valley, west of the river, an army of mounted men, deployed to sweep everything before them. It was Averill's full brigade of Federal cavalry. It was a formidable force. There was but one thing left for Jackson to do--get out as rapidly as possible or be overwhelmed. This he proceeded to do, and accomplished with such skill that he escaped with but slight loss.

Gen. William L. Jackson, while on the bench prior to the war, had held a term of court in Beverly, knew many of the

citizens, and was familiar with the country in the vicinity. Immediately following the fight, and while Averill was still in pursuit of Jackson, Colonel Harris dispatched guards through the country north of Beverly, who arrested quite a large number of citizens, all of whom were peaceable, law-abiding men--good citizens. They were marched into Beverly and formed in line near the old courthouse. Colonel Harris then walked along the front of the line and put this question to each one separately: "Are you a Union man?" When the answer was directly in the affirmative, the man was passed. When the answer was, "My sentiments are with the South," or its equivalent, Harris ordered the person giving such answer to take two steps forward. Several of those in line, in reply to the question, stated that they were "Constitutional Union men"; of these latter were Lennox Camden, a brother of Judge G. D. Camden, and Charles W. Russell, the latter, a late leading merchant and well known throughout the county, and who was a Union man. This answer evidently, in the opinion of Harris, did not constitute sufficient loyalty, for in each instance where this answer was given, such person was ordered to take the two steps to the front. When Harris had finished his questioning, there were thirteen in the advanced line. The number in this instance in the course of time proved to be a frightful exemplification of all that has ever been attributed to it in the way of being an omen of disaster by those given to superstition. The thirteen were immediately sent under guard to the Federal prison at Fort Delaware. The names of those sent were: Lennox Camden, Charles W. Russell, Thomas J. Caplinger, Levi D. Ward, George Caplinger, Jr., Smith Crouch, John Crouch, William Saulsbury, Phillip Isner, Pugh Chenoweth, William Clem, John

-4-

Leary, and Allen Isner.

The public at the time attributed these arrests to Harris's intense hatred of Southern sympathizers and his chagrin and anger at Jackson's having reached the immediate vicinity of Beverly without his knowledge, and especially as Jackson had made announcement of his intended coming several months in advance; all of which Harris realized constituted a severe reflection upon the commander of the post in not having been more alert, and in allowing himself to be thus surprised; and which, but for the miscarriage of Jackson's orders to Colonel Dunn, would have resulted in the probable capture of himself and his entire command; and also, the further fact that Jackson had succeeded in withdrawing his troops and escaping without material loss, all of which was intensified by the rebuke and criticism administered by General Averill, his superior officer. Averill being a West Point graduate, had no special admiration for civilian army officers like Harris.

There is little doubt that Harris was smarting under Averill's criticisms, and especially as Averill attributed his own failure to defeat, if not to capture, Jackson's command to Harris's failure to notify him (Averill) in time. Averill, in his official report, says: "Had Colonel Harris furnished me with timely warning of the approach of the enemy, I should have killed, captured, or dispersed his entire command. As it was, he received but a slight lesson."

Later, on several occasions, most strenuous efforts were made to obtain the release of these men from Fort Delaware, where they were dying like sheep. The public generally knew they were

innocent of any charge; a number of them were influential men; but all efforts were without avail until virtually half of them had died in prison. When finally the survivors, seven in number, were released, one of them, Lennox Camden, died before reaching home. Another, Philip Isner, died a few days after reaching home. Smith Crouch and John Crouch died very soon afterwards. The three survivors, Charles W. Russell, Thomas B. Caplinger, and George Caplinger, were so broken in health as to suffer from the effects of their incarceration and treatment to the day of their demise.

Harris had, prior to the war, been a country doctor, practiced in Ritchie County (now West Virginia) and later, located in Glenville in the same State. After he became identified with the Union cause, he became intensely partisan. In those days intense partisanship was the stepping-stone, for many, to promotion. Harris had risen to the rank of colonel of the 10th Virginia (Federal) Regiment, as stated. This regiment contained many good men, and many who detested Harris. His unpopularity was such that while stationed at Beverly, he was shot at one night by some of his regiment, one bullet passing through his whiskers. Of this I was informed by one of his commissioned officers. Elevated to the rank of colonel, Harris seemed to have become obsessed with an exalted idea of the prominence that such an appointment carried with it. He was stationed at Beverly, a long time. Having the power of a despot, he was much dreaded, especially as he seemed ever ready to give a willing ear to the unreliable and disreputable who approached him with tales about their neighbors, and which resulted generally in the arrest and imprisonment of those so reported. It would be impossible for me to recall to memory, and I presume it is equally

names, the number of citizens of the county, or their names, who were, during the war, arrested and sent under guard to the military prisons of the North, many of them by Harris-- generally without cause and without any specific charge being made known to them, and many of whom did not live to return to their homes.